

Children worked and played hard

By JON LARSON
Post-Record Reporter

Logging camp cooks shopping at Charles and Ursula Farrell's general store in the early 1900s could expect to get a lot - by today's standards - for their money.

In those days, their son, Glenn Farrell, put up orders for the cooks when they came to town. Farrell would pile up heavy sacks of potatoes, sugar and flour, containers of catsup, pickles, shortening, and bacon and ham against the store's sales counter while the cooks went about town completing other errands.

Their typical purchase of food supplies, Farrell recalls was enough to feed an entire logging camp for a week and had to be hauled in a horse-drawn wagon to camps on Livingston Mountain and the upper Washougal and Cape Horn regions.

"And the whole thing would be somewhere between \$35 and \$40 dollars... and I would be amazed that groceries cost that much," Farrell said.

Farrell eventually became the owner of the business his parents founded. But by then, the store had changed from selling food provisions to loggers and townspeople to a men's and women's fashionable clothing store — Farrell and Eddy Department Store at 305 N.E. Fourth Ave. in Camas. This year marks the 85th year the Farrell family has owned a business in downtown Camas.

Although Farrell has spent many years in the retail industry, first in a grocery, and then as a clothier, he recalls with fondness his boyhood memories of Camas.

Farrell was born on Aug. 8, 1907, in his family's home above the store, and was delivered by Camas' first physician, Dr. Louisa Wright.

He recalls that children growing up in downtown Camas knew how to make their own fun when they weren't busy hauling wood, feeding their farm animals or looking after all their other chores.

Children had sports activities, but they weren't like the Little League baseball program of today. The downtown children formed teams of their own to play against children from the Oak Park and Prune Hill neighborhoods, Farrell said.

"I can remember the scores would be 29-42, but we would have fun."

Football was popular, too. Once Farrell had the shoemaker nail a set of rectangular leather cleats to a pair of old shoes so he would be able to dodge tacklers on the muddy Camas High School field.

Children enjoyed swimming and in the summertime built a dam on Blue Creek, a small creek that parallels Division Street and flows downhill toward the James River Corp. paper mill.

It was in Blue Creek that Farrell learned to swim at an early age.

Swimming lessons weren't available in Camas nor Washougal, so youngsters learned to swim on their own or with the help of friends.

"You went and you fell in and you got out as best you could," he said.

Luckily, the water wasn't more than four or five feet deep behind the children's handmade dam, so youngsters learning to swim could easily touch bottom if they needed.

Farrell recalls that as a young boy some of the best ice cream was made in the summer at a little creamery founded by merchants and dairymen. The creamery sat on the western shore of Lackamas Creek, near where it empties into the Washougal River along Northeast Third Avenue Loop.

The creamery also made butter it marketed under the name "Bead Island Butter," so named because of the former Indian burial ground on a small island in the river's floodplain.

Youths loved to play marbles on playgrounds and sidewalks in the fall and spring, Farrell said. They played for "agates" made from actual stone, "cat's-eyes" that cost as much as a dollar, or the cheaper "crookies" made of glazed clay.

Almost every Saturday, he said middle and senior high school youths played marbles on Birch Street between Northeast Third and Northeast Fourth avenues.

Sometimes, the game was for keeps.

"So, if you got involved in a game with some big kids who were really good, you could get cleaned out in a hurry," he said.

Some new inventions made their way to Camas while Farrell was still a youth. He said that every once in a while one of the new, "funny looking" automobiles frightened a horse, prompting the animal to gallop down the street.

Farrell has vivid memories of hearing radio for the first time in his life. His classmates told him about it in elementary school.

"Did you know that you can get messages out of the air without wires being hooked up?" they asked.

"I just told those kids, 'It's impossible. You can't send messages without wires,'" he recalled.

His classmates insisted on taking him to a home that sat on what is now the corner of the Burgerville parking lot. An electrician who worked at the paper mill had boarded up part of a woodshed to create a radio shack. He had also constructed a radio which was contained within an oak cabinet, covered by a glass front. Inside the radio, a spark arched across two electrodes as another operator far away sent a message in Morse code.

Farrell said he can't remember who was sending the message or what it said, but he and his friends were very impressed with the new device.

"Of course, we were spellbound, and watched, and were very quiet," he said.



DRESSED UP for a Sunday ride on their bicycles are Glenn Farrell and his brother Clayton. At left, below, is Farrell with Roy Swank, who later became a doctor and created a special diet to help people with multiple sclerosis. At right, below, Clayton fishes on the Washougal River. (Photos courtesy of Glenn Farrell)



Early years' doctor was woman

For many years, Camas' only doctor was a woman.

Lutie Van Vleet was born in Fern Prairie in 1862 in a house built by her father, Lewis, who had settled a donation land claim in 1853 after driving a team of oxen all the way from Missouri.

As a youngster, Lutie Van Vleet showed an interest in medicine and, for a time, taught school in Grass Valley and other country schools. She saved her money for medical school which she first attended at the University of Oregon, before transferring to the University of Michigan, from where she received her degree in 1885.

Remarkably, she was only 23 years old upon her graduation.

Lutie's first practice was in Missoula, Mont., but after a year she returned to the Camas area.

The doctor was married for a short time to a druggist, William Spicer, with whom she had three children, Cecil, Lewis and Edith. She later married a widower, Jim Wright, who was the father of five children, and the owner of a livery stable.

Dr. Wright was known for her care of the sick and assistance in the delivery of many babies. However, she was killed in 1913 at age 51 in a tragic accident in which she was kicked in the chin by a horse, suffering a blow which broke her neck.

The doctor's funeral services were held at the family's home in Parker's Landing and were attended by many people who came by boat, including some Indians, who reportedly came by canoe. Her passing left behind a legacy of caring and contribution, including 12 years of service on the Camas School Board.